



NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

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(Testimony begins on following page)

Chairman Ackerman, Ranking Republican Mr. Pence, and Members of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia.

Thanks for your very kind invitation to speak today on an extraordinarily important subject, and one which remains close to my heart – our efforts in Afghanistan.

I would note to the subcommittee as we begin this afternoon that I remain a member of the US Defense Department in my capacity as the Director of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at National Defense University, but the views I will represent today are my own. After nineteen months of service in Afghanistan, I remain very closely involved professionally and personally in working to insure the success of our long term undertaking there.

In my judgment, our efforts today in Afghanistan are at a strategic fork in the road. Recent events in Pakistan and the relationship between the two nations only add urgency to this dilemma. We have important choices to make this year – choices which will ultimately determine the outcome of this noble and worthy mission in this strategic crossroads of the world. Hopefully, the results of the upcoming NATO conference in Bucharest will serve to advance the international efforts in Afghanistan. Simply put – we cannot afford to fail in the region.

Frequently, Americans compare and contrast our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I should note a few brief important comparisons between the two for the subcommittee: Afghanistan is a land-locked, mountainous agricultural country with less than 30% of its population living in urban areas – compared with highly urbanized Iraq. Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan is among the world's poorest countries, with few to no natural resources. However, in size it is nearly 50% larger in landmass than Iraq – 647 thousand square kilometers to Iraq's 437 thousand – and it has 4 million more citizens, with a population of about 31 million to Iraq's 27 million. Note: Afghanistan is a significantly larger country with a larger population than Iraq. Yet at the same time, our troop presence in Iraq – and that of our coalition partners – exceeds 160,000. By comparison, NATO and the US combined field fewer than 60,000 troops in Afghanistan – of which nearly 55% are American.

We entered Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the 9-11 attacks to destroy Al Qaeda, overthrow their Taliban allies, and to help Afghanistan return to the community of nations as a democratic state. We remain in Afghanistan today to secure these goals, but also in recognition of the strategic importance of the region centered around Afghanistan. Our presence there with our NATO allies forms a vitally important and stabilizing influence on a volatile part of the world.

Afghanistan stands at the center of an immensely important strategic region. To the west is Pakistan – the world's second largest Muslim state, and one possibly armed with several dozen nuclear weapons. Its present environment reflecting an emerging new government which may well have a much less supportive view of the war on terror should give us pause as we re-assess our mission in Afghanistan – a mission which, as we all know, has implications which extend well beyond Afghanistan's borders. On the northeast corner of Afghanistan is China, a power with growing regional energy and transportation interests. To the north lie three former republics of the Soviet Union – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan – nations always feeling the pull north from Russia and east from China. And to the west, Iran – a growing regional power whose regional intentions remain suspect. Mr Chairman, this tour of the map

around Afghanistan clearly paints the picture of a region of major strategic importance to the United States – and one in which we must continue to exert powerful and sustained leadership.

Since my time in Afghanistan from October 2003 until May 2005, much has changed. I'd like to draw a few comparisons between the mid-point year of my tour, 2004, and last year, 2007. Security incidents – defined as reported acts of violence nation-wide -- totaled 900 in 2004; last year, in 2007 they totaled 8,950 across Afghanistan. Roadside bombs amounted to 325 attacks in 2004; last year, 1,469. Suicide bombings – decidedly a non-Afghan phenomenon – totaled 3 in 2004; last year they exceeded 130, a deadly new tactic being imported from Iraq. Total bombs dropped by Coalition air forces in 2004 were 86; last year, NATO dropped 3,572 bombs in Afghanistan – noteworthy in a war all now commonly define as a complex counter-insurgency fight. Finally, poppy production in 2004 totaled 131K hectares, and while dropping to 104K in 2005, ballooned in 2007 to a new record of 193K hectares. These selected trend lines -- although certainly not a comprehensive depiction of all sectors in Afghanistan – are certainly cause for concern.

On the military side of the ledger, we have also witnessed major changes in our approach since 2004. During 2004, our military forces under US Coalition command totaled only about 20,000, including about 2000 coalition soldiers operating under an Operation Enduring Freedom mandate, generally with robust counter-insurgency rules of engagement. NATO in 2004 comprised only about 7000 troops, in Kabul and the northeast quarter of Afghanistan – and were primarily engaged in peace-keeping and reconstruction tasks. The combined total numbers of international forces in 2004 – US, Coalition, and NATO-- amounted to about 26,000. Today, international forces in Afghanistan total nearly 50,000 with another 3,200 American Marines pledged to join the effort soon. As I noted, almost 30,000 of those 50,000 total troops are American – some serving under NATO command and some under US, with different rules of engagement and command relationships.

In the command and control arena, the US three star HQ which I commanded, based in Kabul – a HQ which built a comprehensive civil-military counter-insurgency plan tightly linked to our embassy led by Ambassador Khalilzad -- has now been dis-established. In late 2006, NATO assumed the overall military command of Afghanistan. Our senior American military HQ – now a two star organization -- is located at Bagram air base, a ninety minute drive north of Kabul. Its geographic responsibility under NATO comprises only Regional Command East – territory representing less than one quarter of the responsibilities which the same US HQ at Bagram held in 2004. Its immense capabilities to oversee a broad counter-insurgency fight all across southern Afghanistan – much as it did in 2004 – in my judgment are being under-utilized.

The enemy in Afghanistan -- a collection of Al Qaeda, Taliban, Hezbi Islami, and foreign fighters – is unquestionably a much stronger force than the enemy we faced in 2004. There are many reasons for this change, but it is -- I am afraid -- an undeniable fact. And of course this enemy extends and in many ways re-generates within the tribal areas of Pakistan. Recent events there – particularly the worrisome prospect of a new Pakistani government entering into some sort of negotiations with the Taliban and other terrorist groups in the tribal areas – are developments which give cause for grave concern.

Mr Chairman, in the face of these admittedly incomplete but worrisome trends, I can offer one equation: Success in Afghanistan equals Leadership plus Strategy plus Resources. Only if we

fully commit our best efforts in all three areas – Leadership, Strategy, and Resources -- and relentlessly integrate these three successfully internally within the US and externally within the international effort -- will we be able to seize the opportunities available to reverse these troubling trends. Only if we make this a regional effort – most especially connecting the Afghanistan and Pakistan dimension in the US strategic approach, and the approach with our friends and allies– will we be able to once again shift the broad trend lines in a positive direction. Only if we objectively and dispassionately examine both where we have been and where we are, will we be able to correctly shape where we are going. If we fail to do so, we face great risks in my estimation to our prospects for success. I look forward to be able to expand upon some possible further prescriptions during your questions. Thank you.